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VI.

INTRIGUES AT THE PARIS CANAL CONGRESS.

[It was rumored in Paris during the late Canal Congress that the concession for the Darien Canal, which was held by a little company of which General Türr is president, was divided into 100 shares of 500 francs each ; and it seemed to be understood that a company of 400,000,000 francs' capital would be formed to purchase the concession from the Türr company, and would pay the stockholders of this association 25,000,000 francs for their privileges. Thus each share of 500 francs would become worth 250,000 francs.

With the fall of Sedan and the fortunes of the Second Empire, a large number of the most prominent Bonapartists lost their means of subsistence, and found themselves in a condition bordering on beggary. There were few men of private resources among them. Some had been placemen or stock speculators, while others had been the recipients of constant and liberal gifts from the Emperor's privy purse. These gentlemen soon began to look to M. de Lesseps, a connection of the Empress Eugénie, for help and guidance. He alone of this helpless and hungry crowd could command the credit and confidence of capitalists. To pierce the Isthmus of Central America had been the cherished wish of Louis Napoleon, and this project was not long in recurring to his dejected followers. Thus the scheme was revived and matured under the sponsorship and direction of M. de Lesseps, the executive duties of the undertaking devolving upon Lieutenant Bonaparte Wyse, whose sister is married to General Türr.

A careful examination of the names of the French delegates to the Canal Congress shows how entirely it was packed with subservient friends of the fallen dynasty ; nor is it well to overlook the fact that the shares of the Türr company were largely held by them. These people once went to Mexico to seek their fortunes in a Franco-Mexican Empire. It seems passing strange that the conspicuous defeat of those plans, which embraced the destruction of the American Union, should have failed to teach them some degree

of caution before affecting to despise the views of the American envoys from Washington, or attempting to tamper with American interests in America.—EDITOR.]

A TEMPORARY company, called the "Commission Internationale d'Exploration," was organized in France in 1876, for the purpose of ascertaining the practicability of an interoceanic canal across the Isthmus of Darien. A certain amount of money was raised by subscription to defray the necessary expenses, on condition that the sums thus subscribed should be returned at the rate of several hundred dollars for every dollar invested. Lieutenant Wyse, of the French Navy, was placed at the head of an expedition and sent to the Isthmus to carry out the explorations, and after two years of labor returned to Paris without having accomplished the purpose for which the expedition under his command had been organized. He had been unable to survey even a line through from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and, in fact, the information obtained by several tentative lines and reconnaissances could not compare favorably with that obtained by the United States surveying expeditions over the same territory. His labors, however, had not been confined to that of a surveyor and explorer. He had visited Bogotá, and obtained a grant for the construction of an interoceanic canal through any portion of the territory of the United States of Colombia. It was a very shrewd conception in him to ask for a concession on such broad terms as to location of the proposed canal, since that was a matter on which Lieutenant Wyse and his friends were yet in the dark.

The Tuyra-Tupisa-Tiati-Acanti route he had recommended in previous reports was so utterly impracticable that it had met with but little favor even among his most sanguine friends. That grant, however, proved to have been the most valuable result of his mission to the Isthmus, and such seemed to be his anticipations, as expressed in the first paragraph of his report to the International Society, August 12, 1878. A canal route was devised in the office of the temporary company in Paris, based on information obtained from the maps of the Panama Railroad and other more or less defective maps of that portion of the Isthmus, prepared from lines of levels run through points more or less distant from the line of the proposed canal, or on mere speculation as to topography, watershed, and other natural conditions. The Interoceanic Canal Congress was then called by M. de Lesseps and the "Geographical Society

of Paris," and Lieutenant Wyse was sent to the United States to invite the appointment of delegates to that body, and to obtain if possible the maps and plans of the Panama Canal, as located by the United States Surveying Expedition of 1875. The latter he failed to accomplish, as he had failed in a similar attempt the year before. The maps and plans had not been published, and the Navy Department did not feel disposed to give him a copy. It is believed that this was a bitter disappointment for Lieutenant Wyse, who had already in contemplation the Panama Canal *à niveau*, and such reliable information would have been of incalculable value to him. It will be apparent to any one well informed of the history of the Paris Interoceanic Canal Congress, and the method of selecting and appointing delegates, that the motives of the promoters and managers of that Convention were only to obtain some support, in the form of an endorsement, by a majority of votes in favor of their plans for a canal across the Isthmus of Panama. This authority, backed by the powerful leadership of M. de Lesseps and his corps of engineers of the Suez Canal, they confidently expected would be sufficient to give to Lieutenant Wyse's grant from the Government of Colombia a value it did not possess. In fact, it was frequently stated by the friends of the Panama scheme, among whom may be mentioned engineers at present holding prominent positions in the Suez Canal, that all they desired was the endorsement by the Congress of the Panama scheme. That the location of the line, as well as the methods by which the gravest engineering difficulties involved in the project recommended for adoption, would be overcome, were matters for future consideration, since M. de Lesseps could raise any amount of money that could be desired, and with this powerful element and engineering skill the canal would be constructed.

The Congress was composed of one hundred and thirty-five delegates, invited by M. de Lesseps and the Geographical Society. Of that number, sixty-eight were appointed from France and sixty-seven from foreign countries, and of this latter number many failed to appear before the Congress. Many of the French delegates were appointed from the Geographical Society, and especially from that branch of the Society called the "Commercial Geographical Society," which seemed to be particularly interested in the success of the Panama scheme, as shown by their unanimously affirmative vote on all questions affecting the Panama scheme.

The presidents, vice-presidents, and secretaries of the commit-

tees were more or less devoted to support the line proposed by Lieutenant Wyse, and, when the final vote was taken, not one of them failed to vote in the affirmative.

The organization of the Congress had all been arranged beforehand. Admiral La Roncière le Noury, President of the Geographical Society, took the presidential chair at the opening session, and transferred it afterward to M. de Lesseps, who then named the officers of the Congress. He also stated that the Congress would be divided into five committees, and read the names of the delegates who would compose the same. On the meeting of the Technical Committee, Admiral Roncière le Noury named its president, vice-presidents and secretaries. In fact, the delegates seemed to have been appointed for the mere purpose of giving their assent to the transactions of that body.

Lieutenants Wyse and Réclues were not members of the Congress, but took a very important part in its deliberations and organization, and on one occasion, when a sub-committee was to be appointed to consider and report on the question of locks, Lieutenant Wyse stood side by side with the President of the Technical Committee, urging the appointment of such delegates as might be in favor of a canal without locks. The result was, that the majority of that sub-committee was uncompromisingly in favor of the proposed Panama Canal. Those delegates who attended the Congress only for the purpose of examining the different projects that might be presented for examination, and deciding in favor of the one possessing the greatest advantages as to facilities of construction, permanency, cost, and facilities for navigation, confined themselves to the presentation and discussion of the facts which were understood by them to be the object of the meeting. They were, however, in the minority, and their opinions had little weight with the opposition, composed of interested parties and their friends. It may be proper to state here that the only reliable and well-digested plans presented for the consideration of the Congress were those prepared by the several "surveying expeditions" sent out by the United States. All others were based on untrustworthy data, or on mere speculation as to natural conditions. In fact, so far as the final result is concerned, the vote might have been taken before any discussion took place, as it was evident from first to last that the Wyse party, backed by the Geographical Society and M. de Lesseps, had previously arranged all the details with such skill that success was virtually secured from the start. When the impractic-

cability of the Panama scheme, as originally presented, was made evident before the Technical Committee, its supporters became much depressed and demoralized, but they soon rallied, and introduced, in less than two days, several modifications to their plans, intended to overcome the objectionable features. These were more or less impracticable as to cost of labor, and permanence of the works proposed ; but one of them was at last accepted with further alterations, by the sub-committee on "Locks," which Lieutenant Wyse had so much contributed in naming. Another sub-committee, composed of eight of the most eminent engineers in the Congress, was appointed to examine and report on the relative merits and probable cost of the different routes submitted to the Technical Committee. They made a thorough investigation of all the facts connected with the several projects, and presented an accurate report. The probable cost of the Panama Canal was estimated at two hundred and nine million dollars, exclusive of the necessary indemnification of the Panama Railroad, amounting to several millions more. The Committee stated that the proposed canal, *à niveau*, had so many doubtful elements of construction that they had been unable to arrive at any conclusions as to its ultimate cost, or the permanency of the works proposed. They reported, at the same time, very favorably on the Nicaragua route, stating that it had been studied with extreme care and skill, and that it possessed all the favorable conditions that could be desired for the execution of the work. Its estimated cost, based on the same prices as those adopted for the Panama route, was fixed by the Committee at one hundred and forty-two million dollars, an amount that could be reduced fifteen million dollars by the introduction of certain modifications in the plans. This report was met by the friends of Lieutenant Wyse with the affirmation that M. de Lesseps *would positively refuse* to accept the presidency of any other canal company except that of Panama—a statement which had the desired effect of bringing back to their party some who had deserted to the side of the best engineers, who seemed to be in favor of the Nicaragua Canal.

An excited discussion followed these reports ; the friends of the Panama scheme attacking the Nicaraguan route in every possible way, and advocating their plans, no matter at what cost. A resolution was passed to the effect that those who had introduced projects for a canal should not be permitted to take part in the debate, thus virtually excluding from the deliberations the dele-

gates from the United States Government, who advocated the Nicaragua route on its own merits. It was at last agreed, amid great confusion and marked anxiety on the part of many of the delegates, that "the Committee, standing on a technical point of view, was of the opinion that a canal, such as would satisfy the requirements of commerce, is possible across the Isthmus of Panama, and recommends, specially, a canal at the level of the sea." The vote stood: sixteen yeas, three nays, eleven abstentions from voting, and seven absentees.

A similar resolution was passed on the following day by the Congress. Of the seventy-two votes in the affirmative, only nineteen were engineers, and, of this last number, eight are at present, or have been, connected with the Suez Canal. Five are not practical engineers, and only one, the delegate from the State of Panama, had ever been connected with any surveys of the Isthmus. And it is believed that, with that exception, not one of the nineteen has ever visited the locality. The delegates from the French Society of Civil Engineers, five in number, either voted nay, or absented themselves from the last two meetings of the Technical Committee and the Congress.

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